

BERNESE MOUNTAIN DOG ILLUSTRATED BREED STANDARD



**PUBLISHED BY
THE BERNESE MOUNTAIN DOG
BREED COUNCIL**

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BERNESE MOUNTAIN DOG ILLUSTRATED BREED STANDARD

INTRODUCTION

It has been felt by many Bernese enthusiasts for some time now that the Breed Standard is an inadequate description of the breed and needed some elaboration and some explanation of the points described. It is for this reason that the following expanded version of the standard has been devised and it is hoped that it will prove of use to owners, breeders and judges alike. To make it as comprehensive as possible, it now includes illustrations showing what is meant by the various phrases used throughout the text. For clarity, the actual words used in the Kennel Club standard are given in bold (capital) type and the explanatory remarks follow in normal (lower case) type.



GENERAL APPEARANCE:
STRONG, STURDY WORKING DOG, ACTIVE, ALERT,
WELL BONED, OF STRIKING COLOUR.

Many of the adjectives used here are correct and indeed essential in any description of the BMD; however, it would be useful to have some idea given in this paragraph of the size of the dog and also some mention of its proportions. The phrase “of above medium size” is the one commonly used and it is difficult to find any other to convey the correct impression. There is no other breed of similar size and substance to the Bernese; it is larger and more solid than a Golden Retriever but not quite as massive as a Newfoundland. The words “of striking colour”, although true to those who know the Bernese, are largely meaningless, giving no idea of the dramatic colouring of the breed, i.e. predominantly black, with white and tan.

The words “active and alert” are very important in this section. A BMD should be strong and well boned, but in seeking strength and bone it is important not to create a sluggish dog. We should always be looking for animation in the eye of the Bernese where the circumstances call for it.

CHARACTERISTICS:
A MULTI-PURPOSE FARM DOG CAPABLE OF DRAUGHT WORK.
A KIND AND DEVOTED FAMILY DOG. SLOW TO MATURE.

TEMPERAMENT:
SELF CONFIDENT, GOOD NATURED, FRIENDLY AND
FEARLESS. AGGRESSIVENESS MUST NOT BE TOLERATED.

These two sections can be taken together and the combined list of qualities gives an accurate description of the character and temperament of the Bernese Mountain Dog, showing why he is valued as a sensible working dog as well as a wonderful family pet and companion. The phrase “capable of draught work” gives a good indication of a strongly made and well muscled dog, with powerful hindquarters and also shows that the temperament must be very stable and “biddable”, willing to co-operate with his owner or handler. Timid, nervous or dominant and he would be less likely to allow himself to be harnessed and carry out his draughting work.

The “multi-purpose farm dog” mentioned in this section also needs a balanced and strong physical frame and sensible temperament to be able to perform all the tasks required of him on the farm. Not mentioned here is the fact that the BMD is occasionally used as a rescue or avalanche dog and for this, the correct temperament is absolutely essential.

The phrase “slow to mature” is also important, as it is widely accepted that Bernese do not mature until they are about 4 years of age.

All the four epithets used in the paragraph on temperament are equally necessary in any description of the Bernese which should show no reserve or timidity with anyone. It goes without saying that an aggressive Bernese is completely untypical and this must be considered the worst fault imaginable in the breed.

Unacceptable temperament may be seen as timidity, nervousness or aggression; timidity often takes the form of the dog tucking its tail firmly between its legs; apprehension is shown in the expression; nervousness can appear in reluctance to be handled, backing away from people, shaking, or at worst, snapping or biting. Aggression towards either people or other dogs is not to be tolerated.

**HEAD AND SKULL:
STRONG WITH FLAT SKULL, VERY SLIGHT FURROW,
WELL DEFINED STOP; STRONG, STRAIGHT MUZZLE.
LIPS SLIGHTLY DEVELOPED.**

This paragraph needs to be read in close conjunction with the sections on eyes, ears and mouth as all these have considerable influence on the head appearance. For instance, the skull should appear to be flat with no suggestion of dome or roundness and the ears are set high and are in harmony with the skull, it being unusual to see a domed skull with high set ears. Some mention should be made here about the effect different markings can have on the apparent proportions of the head. A head with very heavy white marking (i.e. broad blaze and white extending back to the corners of the mouth - or even beyond in some cases) gives a totally different impression from, for example, a head with the same proportions but with very much darker markings.

The much narrower blaze may make the whole head look narrower. Some feel that very dark heads look too gloomy; some that very white markings may make the dog look less intelligent. In any event there are many different head markings which fall into the “acceptable” category and all must be given due consideration. As with all other Bernese characteristics, the preferred type is the “middle of the road” one.

GOOD COLOUR
DISTRIBUTION



MINIMAL WHITE MARKINGS

HEAD MARKINGS



BROAD WHITE MARKINGS



HEAD

The proportions of the best Bernese heads are so harmonious that the impression given is one of nobility and benevolence (expression also comes in here). The very slight furrow can be felt gently with the finger and should not be too exaggerated; and the description of the stop being “well defined” does not necessarily mean as pronounced as in the St Bernard or Boxer. Equally, it should not be Collie-like. Similarly, “lips slightly developed” means that the lips should not be pendulous, nor should the flews be over-developed. There should be sufficient breadth and depth of muzzle, without having the heaviness (massive quality) of the St Bernard. The head should not be long, narrow or snipy. All suggestion of wrinkle or looseness in the head and around the mouth should be avoided. Pigmentation of nose and lips should be black. Bitches should be obviously feminine with slightly smaller heads than males.

EYES:

DARK BROWN, ALMOND SHAPED, WELL FITTING EYELIDS.

The desired colour (dark brown) and shape (almond) indicates by implication that any other shape, e.g. round, or colour, e.g. light brown, are undesirable. Blue eyes are unacceptable. Also, the phrase, “well-fitting eyelids” precludes any condition such as entropion, ectropion or showing of haw etc. However, it is generally agreed that the expression should be benevolent (there are other references to the kind nature of the dog elsewhere in the standard) and also animated. Eyes set too close together give an impression of narrowness to the head as a whole and whilst it is rare to find eyes set too far apart, this would also be untypical. Obviously eye colour which is rather lighter than desired would be a less severe fault than an eye which showed entropion or ectropion, since it would detract only from the aesthetic appearance of the dog and would not affect his function. An eye so dark as to be almost black would tend to lack the true benevolent and alert expression, but a very light eye would also be faulty as it would give a hard expression.

EARS:

**MEDIUM SIZED; SET HIGH, TRIANGULAR SHAPED, LYING
FLAT IN REPOSE; WHEN ALERT BROUGHT SLIGHTLY
FORWARD & RAISED AT THE BASE.**

It is important to read this section with that describing the head and skull. The high set ears called for combined with the “flat skull” give the head its distinctive appearance and attention is rightly drawn to the change of appearance when the dog is very alert and the ears are slightly raised at base. Together with the eye expression this alertness is most characteristic of the Bernese when showing its intelligence and animation and is of great beauty. Ears should not turn back on themselves, giving a “folded” look (rose ears). This is not very common but is quite a serious fault.

MOUTH:

**JAWS STRONG WITH A PERFECT, REGULAR AND COMPLETE
SCISSOR BITE i.e. UPPER TEETH CLOSELY OVERLAPPING
LOWER TEETH AND SET SQUARE TO JAWS.**

It is desirable that the mouth shows complete dentition (i.e. not just in connection with the scissor bite). Pigmentation of the lips should be completely black, like the nose.

There should be 42 teeth in the adult dog (28 in a young puppy). Occasionally a pre-molar (especially in the lower jaw) is missing. The absence of a single tooth is a fault but a relatively minor one; the lack of several teeth would be regarded as a serious fault. Overshot and undershot bites are faults and a wry mouth is a rare, but still more serious fault. A level bite would be regarded as less serious, provided the incisors were well aligned.

ILLUSTRATIONS OF DIFFERENT BITES



CORRECT

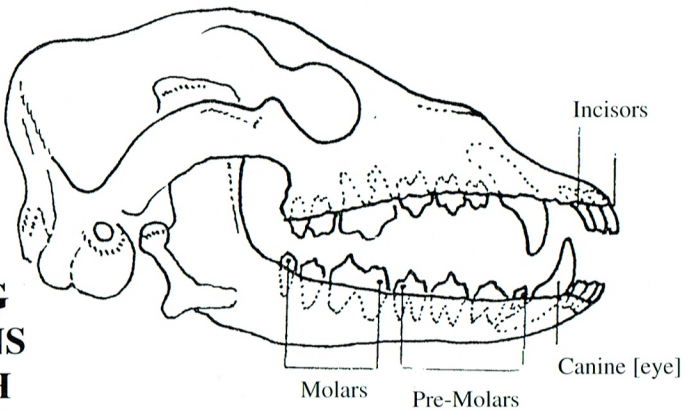


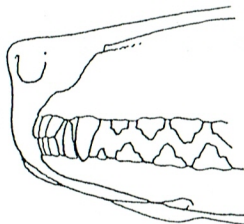
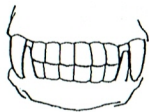
OVERSHOT



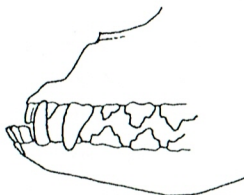
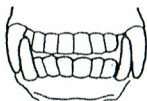
UNDERSHOT

SKULL SHOWING POSITIONS OF TEETH

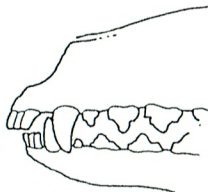




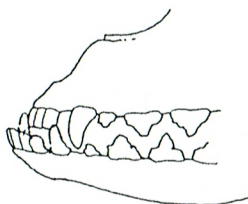
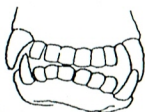
SCISSOR BITE



UNDERSHOT BITE



OVERSHOT BITE



WRY MOUTH

UPPER - 6 Incisors, 2 Canines, 8 Pre-Molars, 4 Molars
 LOWER - 6 Incisors, 2 Canines, 8 Pre-Molars, 6 Molars

NUMBER OF TEETH

NECK:

STRONG, MUSCULAR AND OF MEDIUM LENGTH.

It is important that a too long and reachy neck should be avoided, as should a very short “stuffy” neck, which is often (though not always) associated with upright shoulders.



CORRECT NECK



LONG NECK



SHORT NECK

A Bernese (especially a male) often has a very luxuriant ruff. This can disguise the length of neck, tending to foreshorten it. The neck should extend forwards and slightly upwards from the base and there should be a smooth flow from neck into the shoulders apparent whether the dog is standing or moving. As in all Bernese proportions, the neck should be of moderate length and not exaggerated.

FOREQUARTERS:

SHOULDERS LONG, STRONG AND SLOPING, WITH UPPER ARM FORMING A DISTINCT ANGLE, FLAT LYING, WELL MUSCLED.

FORELEGS STRAIGHT FROM ALL SIDES.

PASTERNS FLEXING SLIGHTLY.

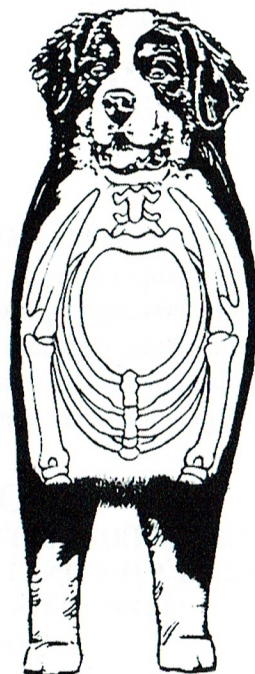
In a coated breed it is often more difficult to assess the shoulder slope. However, a well-angulated shoulder is easy to feel and the blade should run forwards and downwards to the point of shoulder and the humerus or upper arm should then run back at an angle (see sketch) somewhere in the region of 100 degrees.

If the shoulder blade is not well laid back it will tend to produce a front assembly which is too forward placed. A common failing in Bernese is an incorrect upper arm which is either too steep or too short, which will shorten the stride.

Height to depth proportions are given in the following section, but are very relevant here and the dog should have a 50-50 balance from withers to elbow, elbow to ground. In a dog with a well-angulated shoulder and viewed from the side, there should be a substantial forechest and the legs set well back. Viewed from the front the forelegs should be straight and parallel, set neither too narrow, nor too wide, so that the elbows are correctly positioned. The bone should be adequate for the size of the dog (see phrase "well-boned" in first para.) but not so massive as to be coarse.



**CORRECT FRONT
ANGULATION**



**The sketch above shows the ribs, the
shoulder and upper arm
from the front**



CORRECT



FEET POINTING OUT



**FEET POINTING
INWARDS**



**CORRECT
SLIGHTLY
FLEXED PASTERNS**



**UPRIGHT
PASTERNS**



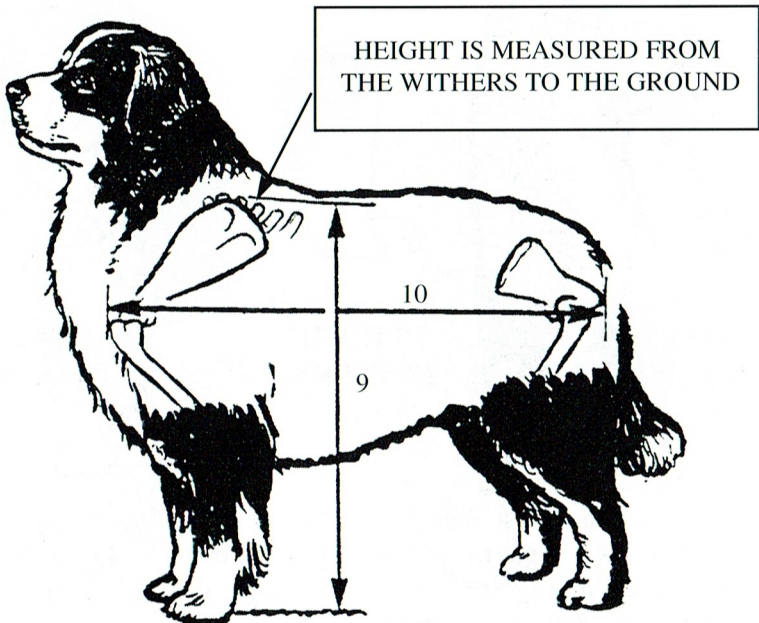
**WEAK
PASTERNS**

Pasterns should not be straight (or “vertical”) when viewed from the side, but should show a slight flexing; this gives the dog a useful “shock absorber” when trotting - essential for a draught dog. Conversely, of course, the pasterns should not be so sloping as to indicate weakness.

BODY:

**COMPACT RATHER THAN LONG. HEIGHT TO LENGTH 9:10.
BROAD CHEST, GOOD DEPTH OF BRISKET REACHING AT
LEAST TO ELBOW. WELL RIBBED; STRONG LOINS.
FIRM, STRAIGHT BACK. RUMP SMOOTHLY ROUNDED.**

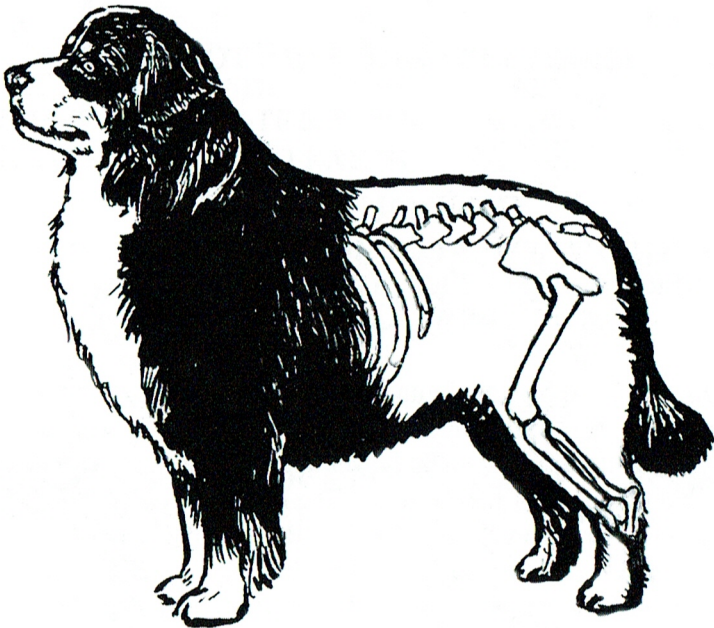
This section is almost all about proportions, which are of paramount importance in determining the correct type. It is here that the sturdiness and power of the BMD is outlined and it is this body shape which gives the breed its characteristic appearance. A Bernese that is long-legged, long-bodied and rangy lacks type just as much as one that does not have the desired markings or bone or colouring. The proportions 9:10 mean that the height (from withers to ground) should be very slightly less than the length (from the point of shoulder to point of buttock). The chest should be broad, as befits a draught animal, without showing excessive width or being out at elbow. The brisket should be as deep as the elbow joint. (The standard here says reaching **AT LEAST** to the elbow, but the words “at least” give an inaccurate description of the brisket and are unnecessary in this paragraph.)



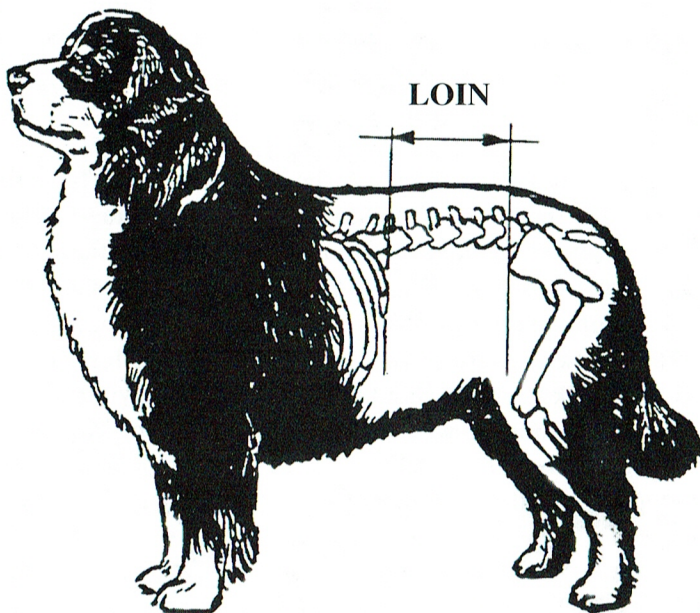
CORRECT PROPORTIONS

The depth of chest should be checked by the judge, as a profuse coat can disguise a shallow brisket. Similarly the wavy Bernese coat on the rump can give the impression that the dog is higher at the croup than at the withers (overbuilt).

“Well ribbed” signifies a good length of ribcage and the loin (from the last rib to the front of the thigh) should be no more than an average handspan. A short ribcage combined with an overlong loin is a serious fault, as it makes for weakness in the structure. Although spring of rib should be positive, there should be no impression of barrel ribs, nor should the dog be slab-sided. Both these are serious faults. Weakness in the loin should be penalised and the back (topline) should be level and firm without any weakness. The croup must be well rounded, not angular or square.



STRONG LOIN WITH GOOD HIND ANGULATION



SHORT RIB CAGE, LOIN TOO LONG

HINDQUARTERS:

BROAD, STRONG AND WELL MUSCLED. STIFLES WELL BENT. HOCK STRONG, WELL LET DOWN AND TURNING NEITHER IN NOR OUT. DEWCLAWS TO BE REMOVED.

The thighs should be broad, giving an appearance of power through the muscling; the stifles well bent – i.e. angulated, leading to well-defined hock joints. This construction gives the power and endurance so necessary in a dog with the functions of the Bernese. The combination of well-turned stifle and muscular second thigh gives the Bernese the strength to perform his multiple tasks. Whether he be drover, draught animal, rescue dog or general farm dog, he needs to have this powerful yet flexible build to equip him for all his work. The hindquarters are particularly important in this type of animal, for it is from the rear that the impetus comes.



CORRECT



COW HOCKS



BOW HOCKS



**WELL LET
DOWN HOCK**



**HOCK TOO
STRAIGHT**



**SICKLE
HOCK**

Hocks “well let down” means that the leg from hock joint to ground should be short in proportion with the rest of the hind leg. Cow hocks (turning in) or bow hocks (turning outwards), straight or sickle hocks are all serious faults in a working dog.



**LEFT: HOCK JOINT NOT
WELL LET DOWN**



**RIGHT: BONES OF THE
REAR LEG.**

FEET:

SHORT, ROUND AND COMPACT.

It needs to be understood that the feet should be well padded and not thin; toes should be arched. The term “cat feet” is a useful one to bear in mind when describing the Bernese foot. Any suspicion of flatness in the feet should be penalised, as should splayed feet and long toes. Excessive hair on the feet is usually trimmed.



THIN FOOT

TAIL:

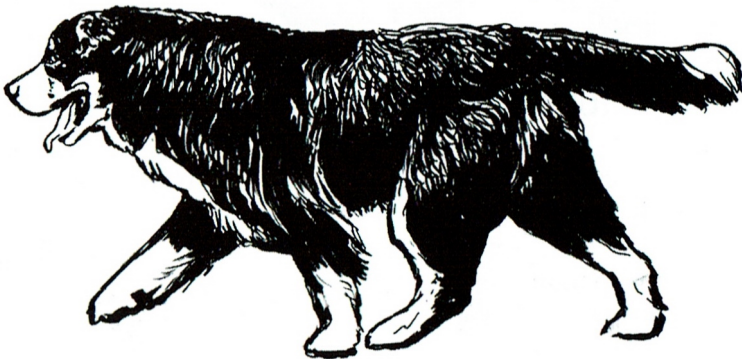
BUSHY, REACHING JUST BELOW HOCK. RAISED WHEN ALERT OR MOVING BUT NEVER CURLED OR CARRIED OVER BACK.

The tail should be fairly thick and well covered in hair, but the hair should not be so long as to form a “flag”. “Reaching just below hock” means that the last bone in the tail should at least reach the hock joint. Some dogs have short tails which are disguised by the feathering giving the tail the appearance of being longer. “Raised when alert” means that the tail may be elevated. If the dog is excessively excited the tail may lift to a 45 degree angle. However, the tail should not be sickle shaped or curled in any way, nor carried over the back, all of which are serious failings. A kink (slight bend) in the tail is a relatively minor fault.

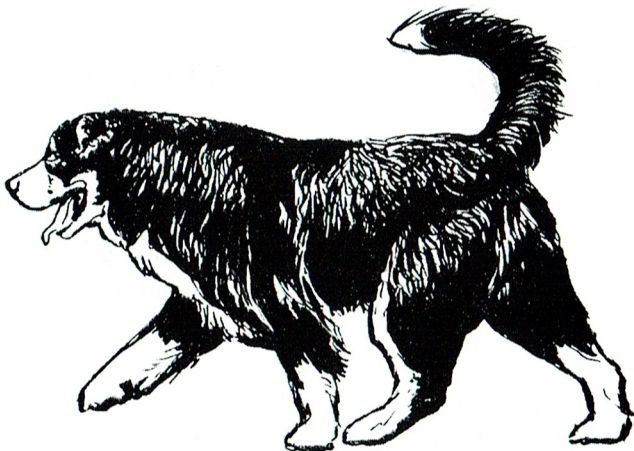
GAIT/MOVEMENT:

STRIDE REACHING OUT WELL IN FRONT, FOLLOWING WELL THROUGH BEHIND; BALANCED STRIDE IN ALL GAITS.

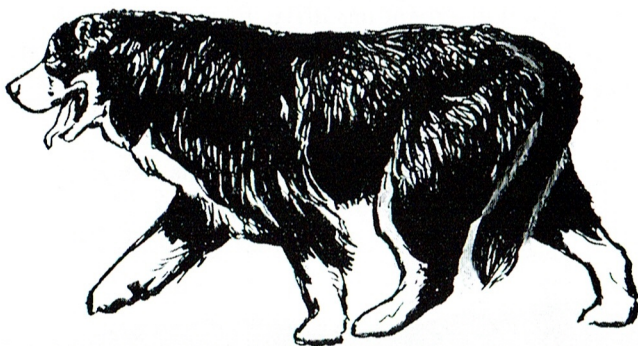
The correct construction which should give rise to the desired gait in a Bernese has been detailed in the preceding paragraphs on shoulder and hindquarters. The easy, long stride of the forelegs combined with the correct powerful drive from the short rear pasterns is only brought about by the correct conformation as described earlier. No examples of poor movement are given in the standard, but it must be emphasised that crossing behind, or moving too close, moving too wide, prancing or hackney trot are all undesirable and should be penalised. A dog whose construction is too upright, both at front and in the rear, will appear to be balanced but will lack the desired reach and drive. A lack of balance between fore and hindquarters would also bring about faulty movement because the animal would have to compensate in some way or take evasive action. If the shoulder is steep and the front movement therefore choppy or short and the hindquarters are well angulated and the hind movement has drive, then there will be some interference between hind and forefeet and the dog will either move close behind or overreach. Or it may lift its front feet excessively high to avoid interference from the hind feet.



GOOD MOVEMENT & CORRECT TAIL CARRIAGE

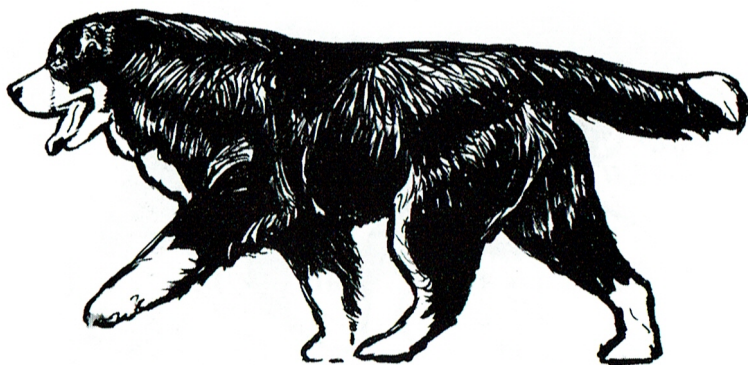


TAIL CURLED TOO HIGH



UNTYPICAL TAIL CARRIAGE

“Crabbing” (where the dog’s spinal column is not pointed in the direction of travel) is also extremely faulty. Pacing occurs when the legs on the same side move together and gives rise to a distinct “roll”. This type of gait does not allow accurate assessment of the dog’s movement. Movement should have precision and firmness and there should be no looseness in the movement of the feet, which should remain straight. Turning inwards or outwards should be regarded as faults.



PACING - INCORRECT



CORRECT



FEET TURNING OUT



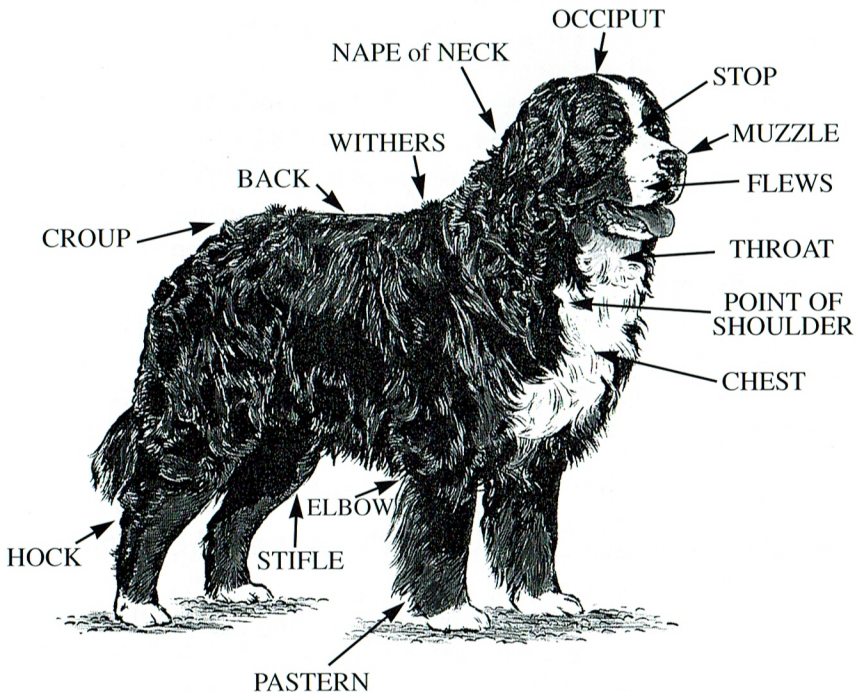
FEET TURNING IN

FAULTS:

ANY DEPARTURE FROM THE FOREGOING POINTS SHOULD BE CONSIDERED A FAULT AND THE SERIOUSNESS WITH WHICH THE FAULT SHOULD BE REGARDED SHOULD BE IN EXACT PROPORTION TO ITS DEGREE.

NOTE: MALE ANIMALS SHOULD HAVE TWO APPARENTLY NORMAL TESTICLES FULLY DESCENDED INTO THE SCROTUM.

NEUTERED DOGS AND BITCHES MAY BE SHOWN PROVIDED THAT THE KENNEL CLUB HAS BEEN NOTIFIED BEFORE THE DOGS ARE EXHIBITED.



POINTS OF THE BERNESE MOUNTAIN DOG

TERMINOLOGY

POINTS OF THE BERNESE MOUNTAIN DOG

OCCIPUT	Upper back point of the skull.
STOP	The step up from muzzle to skull.
FLEWS	Upper lips.
WITHERS	The highest point of the body, immediately behind the neck. The height of the dog is measured from this point to the ground.
CROUP	On the back between the front of pelvis and the root of tail.
HOCK	The tarsus joint on the hind leg between the second thigh and the metatarsus.
STIFLE	The knee joint between the thigh & the second thigh.
THIGH	The hindquarters from hip to stifle [femur].
SECOND THIGH	The lower thigh bones from the stifle to the hock [fibula & tibia].
BRISKET	The forepart of the body below the chest and between the forelegs.
PASTERN	Foreleg between the wrist & the toes.
ELBOW	Joint between the upper arm & the forearm.
FOREARM	The bones of the forelegs from the elbow to the wrist [radius & ulna].
SHOULDER	Sloping blade [scapula] of the forequarters.
POINT OF SHOULDER	Joint where the bottom of the scapula & the top of the humerus meet.
UPPER ARM	The humerus or bone of the foreleg between the shoulder blade & the elbow.
HACKNEY	The high lifting action of the front feet.
PACING	A gait in which the left foreleg & the left hind leg advance in unison, then the right foreleg & the right hind leg.
OVERREACHING	Fault caused by more angulation and drive from behind than in front, so that the rear feet are forced to step to one side of the forefeet to avoid interference or clipping.
CRABBING	Dog moves with body at an angle to the line of travel.

The Bernese Mountain Dog Breed Council consists of the following clubs:-

The Bernese Mountain Dog Club of Great Britain

The Bernese Mountain Dog Club of Scotland

The Northern Bernese Mountain Dog Club

The Southern Bernese Mountain Dog Club

Copies of this Bernese Mountain Dog Illustrated Breed Standard can be obtained from the secretaries of the breed clubs noted above.

Their current names and addresses can be obtained from:-

The Kennel Club, Clarges Street, Piccadilly, London.

W1Y 8AB. Telephone:- 0870-606 6750.

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